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R 261149Z MAY 98
 FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0715
 INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
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 AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
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 AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
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 CIA WASHDC
 DIA WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 CARACAS 001580

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 SUBJECT: WHATEVER IT TAKES TO WIN: A VENEZUELAN CAMPAIGN NOTE-
 BOOK, ISSUE 5 (APRIL 14-MAY 11)

CLASSIFIED BY
 1.5(D).

REASON:

B6

 WELCOME TO OUR CAMPAIGN NOTEBOOK

1. (U) THIS IS THE FIFTH IN A BIWEEKLY SERIES OF REPORTS ON

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
 REVIEW AUTHORITY: OSCAR J OLSON
 CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON: 1.4(D)
 DECLASSIFY AFTER: 25 MAY 2018
 DATE/CASE ID: 16 JUL 2009 200503654

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VENEZUELA'S 1998 ELECTIONS. (THIS ISSUE WILL COVER A FOUR-WEEK PERIOD.) DIVIDED INTO THREE SECTIONS -- CAMPAIGN NEWS TICKERS, VIGNETTES, AND HIGH-FLYERS AND BOTTOM-FEEDERS -- WE HOPE TO USE THIS NOTEBOOK TO BRING YOU BREAKING NEWS, RUMORS AND INSIDER GOSSIP, AND PROFILES OF THE MANY POLITICAL HANDLERS, CAMPAIGN WORKERS, AND POLITICIANS WHO WILL MAKE THIS ELECTION HAPPEN. THIS NOTEBOOK IS DESIGNATED TO COMPLEMENT OUR REGULAR POLITICAL REPORTING ON THE ELECTIONS, PROVIDING YOU A GLIMPSE OF THE "OFF CAMERA" POLITICS WHICH WILL NOT APPEAR ELSEWHERE.

CAMPAIGN NEWS TICKER

-- (U) CARACAS MAYOR AND DEMOCRATIC ACTION (AD) PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE ANTONIO LEDEZMA PROPOSED APRIL 19 A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO PROHIBIT COUPSTERS FROM STANDING FOR PUBLIC OFFICE. LEDEZMA HAD TOLD US PREVIOUSLY THAT HE THOUGHT CHAVEZ'S CANDIDACY SET A "TERRIBLE" PRECEDENT, OPENING THE DOOR FOR MILITARY OFFICERS TO TAKE "TWO BITES AT POWER, ONE THROUGH FORCE THE ARMS, AND

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THE OTHER THROUGH THE BALLOT BOX." LEDEZMA'S PROPOSAL WAS ATTACKED IMMEDIATELY BY THOSE LINKED TO HUGO CHAVEZ. HOMELAND FOR ALL (PPT) CONGRESSIONAL LEADER JOSE ALBORNOZ SAID, "THEY ARE TRYING TO TAKE CHAVEZ OUT OF ELECTORAL PLAY." INTERESTINGLY, THOSE NOT FRIENDLY TO CHAVEZ RESPONDED TEPIDLY TO THE PROPOSAL. MOVEMENT TOWARD SOCIALISM (MAS) DEPUTY LUIS MANUEL ESCULPI SAID THERE IS SIMPLY NOT ENOUGH TIME TO PASS SUCH AN AMENDMENT. NEWLY-ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE HOUSE OF DEPUTIES IXORA ROJAS STATED THAT THE PEOPLE WILL HAVE THE LAST WORD WITH THEIR VOTES. CONVERGENCIA PARTY BOSS JUAN SOSA MAURY COMMENTED THAT THE PROPOSAL IS "INTERESTING," BUT NEEDS FURTHER INVESTIGATION.

-- (U) FORMER PRESIDENT LUIS HERRERA CAMPINS TOLD A GATHERING OF SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY (COPEI) SUPPORTERS, "MILITARY COUP LEADERS HAVE BEEN THE GREATEST FAILURE AND DECEPTION FOR THE POPULAR MASSES WHO AT ONE TIME PLACED THEIR FAITH IN THESE LEADERS. THOSE WHO ABUSE THE TRUST OF THE REPUBLIC BY USING ARMS TO SEIZE POWER, SOONER OR LATER, ARE PUNISHED BY THE CONSCIENCE OF THE CITIZENRY."

-- (U) IN AN INDIRECT ATTACK ON CHAVEZ, CLAUDIO FERMIN DECLARED, "IT IS NOT TRUE THAT VENEZUELA HAS PREFERRED ARMS OVER LAWS. IT IS NOT TRUE THAT VENEZUELA HAS PREFERRED PHYSICAL ACTION AND CONFRONTATION OVER THE NORMS OF DEMOCRATIC DOCTRINE."

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-- (U) DECLARING HIMSELF TO BE THE CANDIDATE OF "CIVILIZED RUPTURE," HENRIQUE SALAS ROMER STATED TO AN AUDIENCE AT THE IESA BUSINESS SCHOOL THAT VENEZUELA DOES NOT SEEK AN AVENGER FOR ITS NEXT PRESIDENT.

-- (U) IRENE SAEZ TOLD THE PRESS, "VIOLENCE, HATE, AND RESENT-
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MENT WILL NOT GET THE COUNTRY OUT OF THE CRISIS IN WHICH WE LIVE.
THE PEOPLE CLAMOR FOR SOLUTIONS TO THEIR PROBLEMS, BUT IN A
CLIMATE OF PEACE AND SOCIAL SECURITY." LATER, THE MAYORESS
ASSERTED THAT ANYONE WHO COMMITS TREASON DOES NOT MERIT THE
PRESIDENCY.

-- (U) CHAVEZ SOUGHT TO DEFLECT THESE CRITICISMS, SAYING, "I
WILL NOT FALL TO THAT LEVEL." HE CALLED ON SAEZ TO MAINTAIN HER
CIVILITY AS "A MODEL FOR VENEZUELAN," AND SAID HER CRITICISM OF
HIM HAD BECOME SO SHRILL THAT SHE "SOUNDS LIKE CARLOS ANDRES'
PEREZ." CHAVEZ IS STRUGGLING TO MAINTAIN AN ALOOF AIR IN REGARD
TO MOUNTING CRITICISMS, ALTHOUGH THOSE CLOSE TO HIM SAY HE IS
THIN-SKINNED AND IS FRETTEING ABOUT THE "CHARACTER ASSASSINATION"
HE RECEIVES FROM OTHER CANDIDATES.

-- (U) CHAVEZ PUBLICLY ASSERTED THAT HE HAS RECEIVED CREDIBLE
INFORMATION OF SEVERAL DEATH THREATS AGAINST HIM FROM PEOPLE WITH
TIES TO VENEZUELAN SECURITY FORCES. CHAVEZ WOULD NOT PROVIDE
EVIDENCE, SAYING ONLY THAT HE HAS RECEIVED TIP-OFFS FROM ACTIVE
AND RETIRED MILITARY OFFICERS. CHAVEZ CALLED ON THE "PEOPLE" TO
PROTECT HIM.

-- (U) MEMBERS OF CHAVEZ'S POLICE AND INTELLIGENCE COMMANDO HAVE
COMPLAINED ABOUT BEING HARASSED BY THE CIVILIAN INTELLIGENCE

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R 261149Z MAY 98
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 TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0716
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 DIA WASHDC
 USIA WASHDC 1567
 USDOC WASHDC 2861

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 05 CARACAS 001580

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SERVICE (DISIP) AND METROPOLITAN POLICE. THIS COMMANDO, MADE UP OF FORMER COUPSTERS AND EX-POLICE OFFICERS REMOVED FROM THE FORCE FOR DISCIPLINARY OR CORRUPTION REASONS, MADE THE COMPLAINT APRIL 19 FOLLOWING THE ARREST OF COMMANDO MEMBER OSCAR ARAPE. TAREK WILLIAM SAAB, A LAWYER WHO SUPPORTS RADICAL CAUSES, FILED A COMPLAINT ON BEHALF OF ARAPE WITH THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE ALLEGING HARASSMENT BY THE INTERNAL SECURITY (DISIP) AGENTS.

-- (U) ATTEMPTING TO ALLAY THE FEARS OF THE FOREIGN INVESTMENT COMMUNITY, CHAVEZ DECLARED ON APRIL 20 TO FEDECAMARAS, A FEDERATION OF CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE, "TO ALL FOREIGN INVESTORS, I SEND THE MESSAGE: WELCOME. WE WILL WORK WITH FOREIGN INVESTORS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF SOVEREIGNTY AND THE INTERESTS OF THE COUNTRY." CHAVEZ ALSO STATED THAT HE "WILL REVIEW, BUT NOT ANNUL" PRIVATIZATION CONTRACTS TO ENSURE THAT THEY DO NOT VIOLATE ANY LAW OR THE CONSTITUTION. COMPARING HIMSELF TO BRITISH PRIME MINISTER TONY BLAIR, CHAVEZ DECLARED THAT HE WILL SEARCH FOR A THIRD WAY BETWEEN "THE SAVAGERY OF CAPITALISM AND UNWORKABLE SOCIALISM."

-- (U) ON APRIL 23, SAEZ CALLED FOR A "COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT" TO

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TRANSFORM VENEZUELA INTO A FIRST WORLD COUNTRY AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF CONSECOMERCIO, A CONSORTIUM OF BUSINESSES. SAEZ SKETCHED OUT A PROGRAM BY WHICH SHE HOPES TO PROVIDE HEALTH AND EDUCATION TO THOSE MOST IN NEED; TO ESTABLISH A MODERN, STRONG, AND EFFICIENT STATE; AND TO RESTRUCTURE THE STATE VIA DECENTRALIZATION. DURING AN IMPROVISED ADDRESS TO THE GATHERING, CHAVEZ OFFERED "SECURITY AND CONFIDENCE." ONE CONCRETE PROPOSAL OFFERED BY CHAVEZ WAS TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF INTERNAL NATIONAL GUARD

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CHECKPOINTS AS A WAY TO IMPROVE INTERNAL TRADE.

-- (U) TWO FORMER MILITARY OFFICERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN CHAVEZ'S 1992 COUP ATTEMPT HAVE ASSERTED THAT CHAVEZ BETRAYED THE PROMISES OF THE COUP. QUESTIONING WHY CHAVEZ SURRENDERED, BOTH FORMER COUPSTERS HAVE CALLED ON CHAVEZ TO MAKE PUBLIC THE TERMS OF HIS SURRENDER. ONE FORMER OFFICER CRITICIZED CHAVEZ FOR HIS LACK OF COHERENT POLITICAL CONVICTIONS, AND SUGGESTED THAT CHAVEZ SOLD OUT THE COUP BY MAKING DEALS WITH "ULTRA-LEFTISTS."

-- (U) IN A BLAST FROM THE PAST, THE RADICAL FRINGE GROUP RED FLAG ANNOUNCED ITS CONDITIONS FOR ENDORSING CHAVEZ. THE PARTY'S SECRETARY GENERAL GABRIEL PUERTA, DECLARED THAT HIS PARTY WOULD ONLY SUPPORT CHAVEZ IF HE PRONOUNCED HIMSELF FOR "TRULY" REVOLUTIONARY OBJECTIVES, FOLLOWED AN IDEOLOGICAL LINE, AND MAINTAINED AN ANTI-NEOLIBERAL POSITION DEVOID OF "AMBIGUITIES."

-- (U) RETURNING TO THE VISA ISSUE, CHAVEZ RECENTLY AVERRED AT A RALLY, "TO BE PRESIDENT OF VENEZUELA, I DO NOT NEED AN AMERICAN VISA." PERFUNCTORILY EXPRESSING HIS RESPECT FOR THE U.S. AND SAYING THAT HE WANTS TO HAVE GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE U.S., CHAVEZ ASSERTED, "WHAT WE WILL NOT PERMIT IS THAT (THE U.S.) INTERFERE AND MEDDLE IN (VENEZUELAN) POLITICS, WE WILL NOT TOLERATE IT; WE HAVE DIGNITY." REFERRING TO REMARKS ARA A/S DAVIDOW MADE REGARDING CHAVEZ'S INELIGIBILITY FOR A VISA, CHAVEZ SAID, "A FEW DAYS AGO WE READ NEWS FROM WASHINGTON, IN WHICH SOME MAN BY THE NAME OF JEFFREY DAVIDOW, WHO I BELIEVE ON FEBRUARY 4, 1992 WAS AMBASSADOR IN VENEZUELA (NOTE: MICHAEL SKOL WAS THE AMBASSADOR AT THE TIME.), DECLARED THAT THE U.S. WILL NOT GRANT CHAVEZ A VISA BECAUSE HE ATTEMPTED A COUP AGAINST DEMOCRACY AND SHAMED THE HONOR OF THE VENEZUELAN MILITARY. WELL, LET ME TELL YOU THAT IN

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VENEZUELA, A GROUP OF YOUNG SOLDIERS, OF A DEMOCRATIC MIND,

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PROGRESSIVE, AND REVOLUTIONARY TOOK THE ARMS OF THE PEOPLE TO REVINDICATE THE HONOR OF THE VENEZUELAN MILITARY BECAUSE THE PEOPLE WANT DEMOCRACY. OF COURSE, THAT IS NOT SOMETHING THAT HE (DAVIDOW) IS GOING TO EASILY UNDERSTAND."

-- (C) JOSE VINCENTE RANGEL, A WELL-KNOWN POLITICAL COMMENTATOR, COMMENTED TO A TRAVELLING COMPANION IN MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT'S WAITING AREA THAT CHAVEZ'S CANDIDACY IS LIKE "POLITICAL SHOCK THERAPY." UNBEKNOWNST TO RANGEL, THE CAMPAIGN NOTEBOOK WAS SEATED BEHIND HIM AND OVERHEARD HIS CONVERSATION. RANGEL SAID THAT VENEZUELAN DEMOCRACY HAS BECOME COMPLACENT, AND EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT A CHAVEZ PRESIDENCY WOULD AWAKE THE VENEZUELAN PUBLIC, AND REINVIGORATE VENEZUELAN POLITICS.

VIGNETTES

AN OMBUDSMAN FOR THE NATION

2. (U) ON APRIL 20, THE CARACAS DAILY "EL NACIONAL" ANNOUNCED THE CREATION OF THE POSITION OF POLITICAL OMBUDSMAN. ELIAS

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R 261149Z MAY 98
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0717
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
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SANTANA, THE WELL-RESPECTED LEADER OF TWO PRIVATE NGOS--ESCUELA DE VECINOS (PROMOTES NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY) AND QUEREMOS ELIGIR (PROMOTES ELECTORAL REFORM)--WILL SERVE AS OMBUDSMAN, AND DIRECT A SMALL OFFICE AT "EL NACIONAL." IN ADDITION TO PROVIDING ADVICE TO THE EDITORS OF THE NEWSPAPER, SANTANA WILL WORK TO EDUCATE THE ELECTORATE BY PROVIDING AN OUTLET FOR BALANCED POLITICAL INFORMATION.

3. (U) THIS NEW OMBUDSMAN WILL ACTIVELY ENGAGE THE PUBLIC THROUGH PHONE-IN RADIO SHOWS, PUBLIC MEETINGS, AND FOCUS GROUPS. FOR EXAMPLE, DURING HIS FIRST WEEK ON THE JOB, SANTANA UNDERTOOK AN AMBITIOUS SCHEDULE INCLUDING FOUR RADIO PROGRAMS, ONE FOCAL GROUP; AND A TELEVISION APPEARANCE. ADDITIONALLY, HE WILL BE ACCESSIBLE BY PHONE, FAX, AND E-MAIL. THE RESULTS GLEANED FROM THESE PUBLIC ENCOUNTERS WITH THE PUBLIC WILL BE PUBLISHED IN TWO COLUMNS PER WEEK.

4. (U) SANTANA HIGHLIGHTED IN HIS FIRST COLUMN AS OMBUDSMAN THE REQUEST BY ONE READER FROM MARACAIBO THAT REPORTERS COVER IN GREATER DETAIL THE PRIVATE LIVES OF LEADING PRESIDENTIAL CONTENDERS. THE READER ASKED FOR REPORTS ON THE FAMILY, RESIDENCES, CARS, INVESTMENTS, PASTIMES, PERSONAL LIKES AND DISLIKES, AND FRIENDS OF EACH CANDIDATE. THE DIRECTOR OF POLITICAL INFORMATION OF "EL NACIONAL" RESPONDED POSITIVELY TO SANTANA'S INQUIRY ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF REPORTING ON THE PRIVATE LIVES OF CANDIDATES, AND PROPOSED A SERIES OF REPORTS ON THE MATTER.

5. (U) IN A COMPANION ARTICLE, SANTANA WROTE ABOUT AN ARGENTINE
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ORGANIZATION "CITIZEN POWER" THAT PUBLISHES REPORTS ON THE LIVES
CANDIDATES. SANTANA WRITES THAT THREE COMMON CITIZENS, AFTER A
BRIEF TRAINING PERIOD, OBTAIN AN APPOINTMENT TO DIRECTLY INTER-
VIEW EACH CANDIDATE WITHOUT THE INTERVENTION OF CAMPAIGN STAFF-
ERS. THE INTERVIEWERS USE A PREPARED SET OF QUESTIONS TO GUIDE
THEIR INTERVIEW. THE RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEW ARE THEN PUBLISHED
IN HANDOUTS, RELEASED ON THE WORLDWIDE WEB, AND FAXED TO VOTERS
UPON REQUEST. SANTANA CONCLUDES THIS BRIEF ARTICLE BE MAKING
AVAILABLE MATERIALS FROM "CITIZEN POWER" TO ANY INTERESTED
READER.

VIRTUAL ELECTIONS

6. (U) THE ELECTRONIC ELECTION MAGAZINE "DESAFIO 98" IS CONDUCT-
ING VIRTUAL ELECTIONS. ASKING ITS READERSHIP TO VOTE BY INTERN-
ET, DESAFIO OFFERS VOTING OPTIONS EACH WEEK ON THE FIRST PAGE OF
ITS INTERNET SITE. GIVEN THAT ONLY THE RELATIVELY WELL-TO-DO
HAVE ACCESS TO INTERNET, THE VOTING RESULTS SO FAR ARE NOT
SURPRISING. HENRIQUE SALAS ROMER LEADS TO VOTE, WITH NEARLY 40
PERCENT OF THE ON-GOING VOTE. IN SECOND PLACE IN IRENE, FOLLOWED
BY CHAVEZ.

CVI UNDER THE GUN

7. (U) THE VENEZUELAN MARKET STUDIES COMPANY (CVI), THE POLLING
COMPANY WHICH HAS MARKED THE RISE OF HUGO CHAVEZ TO FIRST PLACE
IN THE PRESIDENTIAL POLLS, HAS BEEN ACCUSED OF SELLING ITS
POLLING RESULTS TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER AND IS NOW A DEFENDANT IN A
COURT CASE BROUGHT BY THOSE WHO ACCUSE CVI OF MANIPULATING PUBLIC
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OPINION BY PUBLISHING FALSE POLLING DATA.

8. (U) CVI IS RELATIVELY NEW TO POLITICAL POLLING, HAVING EARNED
ITS KEEP DURING THE PAST EIGHT YEARS DOING BRAND SURVEYS AND
OTHER CONSUMER POLLING FOR PRIVATE COMPANIES. ANTICIPATING THE
1998 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, AND BELIEVING THAT ACCURATE POLITI-
CAL POLLING WOULD INCREASE ITS PUBLIC PROFILE AND ATTRACT MORE
PRIVATE SECTOR CLIENTS, CVI BEGAN TO DEVELOP ITS POLITICAL
POLLING CAPABILITIES. BUILDING ON ITS EXISTING SYSTEMS, CVI
BEGAN TO ADD POLITICAL QUESTIONS TO ITS REGULAR BRAND SURVEYS.
IN THE SUMMER OF 1997, CVI BEGAN TO PUBLISH THE RESULTS OF ITS
MONTHLY POLLS. IT ALSO BEGAN TO CONDUCT WEEKLY "FLASH" POLLS
DESIGNED TO TRACK THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUPPORT FOR CANDIDATES ON A

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SHORT TERM BASIS. THESE FLASH POLLS WERE THE FIRST POLLS TO PICK UP CHAVEZ'S RAPID MARCH FROM FOURTH IN POPULAR PREFERENCE TO FIRST. PUBLISHED BY "EL NACIONAL" ON A REGULAR BASIS, CVI BECAME THE POLLING COMPANY OF THE MOMENT.

9. (U) AS CVI'S PROFILE INCREASED, SO DID ATTACKS AGAINST CVI. CVI WAS CALLED A "PERUVIAN COMPANY" WHICH WAS INTERFERING IN VENEZUELA'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS. IT WAS ALSO ACCUSED OF OFFERING TO IMPROVE CANDIDATE RATINGS IN EXCHANGE FOR PAYMENT. FINALLY, ITS WAS NAMED AS A DEFENDANT IN A COURT CASE FOR MANIPULATING PUBLIC OPINION DURING AN ELECTORAL SEASON BY PROVIDING FALSE INFORMATION

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0718
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
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AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
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TO THE PUBLIC.

10. (U) CVI SOUGHT TO DEAL WITH THESE CHARGES IN A RELATIVELY LOW-KEY FASHION. IT MADE A POINT OF TELLING THE PRESS AND ITS CLIENTS THAT IT IS A VENEZUELAN COMPANY OF RELATIVELY LONG-STANDING, AND THAT IT CONSIDERS ITSELF A "CUTTING EDGE" COMPANY IN REGARD TO POLLING TECHNIQUES. (NOTE: ITS PRESIDENT, RODOLFO BARREDA, IS A PERUVIAN NATIONAL WHO HAS LIVED IN VENEZUELA FOR 13 YEARS. END NOTE.) IT WAS ALSO SCRUPULOUS IN MAKING CLEAR THAT IT DOES NOT DO NATIONAL SURVEYS, BUT INSTEAD "MARKET SAMPLINGS" IN FIVE MAJOR METROPOLITAN AREAS. IN THIS REGARD, CVI DID NOT PRETEND THAT ITS SURVEY RESULTS REPRESENTED AN ACCURATE MEASUREMENT OF NATIONAL OPINION, ALTHOUGH IT DID ARGUE THAT IT POLLED ACROSS SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CLASSES AND ACROSS A LARGE GEOGRAPHIC REGION, AND THEREFORE THAT ITS POLLS WOULD REFLECT CHANGES IN OPINION AT A NATIONAL LEVEL.

11. (U) FOLLOWING THE COURT CASE BROUGHT AGAINST CVI, THE POLLING COMPANY WENT PUBLIC WITH ITS DISPUTE WITH THE BLOQUE DE ARMAS COMPANY, A LARGE MEDIA AND NEWSPAPER COMPANY IN VENEZUELA. CVI PRESIDENT BARREDA HAD TOLD US ABOUT HIS PROBLEMS WITH BLOQUE DE ARMAS PREVIOUSLY, BUT HAD REFRAINED FROM PUBLIC COMMENT. HOWEVER, DURING THE FIRST PART OF MAY, BARREDA SENT AN E-MAIL TO ALL SUBSCRIBERS DETAILING BLOQUE DE ARMAS EFFORTS TO GET CVI TO IMPROVE ITS MARKETING SURVEYS OF NEWSPAPER READERSHIP IN VENEZUELA. ACCORDING TO BARREDA, IN 1997 CVI DID SUCH A SURVEY. BLOQUE DE ARMAS NEWSPAPERS DID NOT FEATURE AMONG THE MOST READ NEWSPAPERS, A RESULT WHICH BLOQUE DE ARMAS BELIEVED WOULD UNDER-

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MINE ITS ADVERTISING REVENUE. IN AN EFFORT TO IMPROVE ITS STANDING IN THE POLL, BARREDA TOLD US, BLOQUE DE ARMAS OFFERED TO PAY UNDER THE TABLE. CVI REFUSED. THE RESULT WAS A BLOQUE DE ARMAS DEFAMATION CAMPAIGN DESIGNED TO CALL INTO DOUBT CVI'S CREDIBILITY AS A POLLING COMPANY.

12. (U) CVI IS WORRIED ABOUT THE COURT CASE--WHICH IT SEES AS DELIBERATE HARASSMENT--BUT HAS TAKEN SOME COMFORT IN THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT THE TREND IT DETECTED SEVERAL MONTHS AGO IS NOW ACCEPTED BY NEARLY EVERYONE AS A RELATIVELY ACCURATE PORTRAYAL OF VENEZUELAN POLITICAL REALITY. NEVERTHELESS, BARREDA IS

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TIRED OF THE CONTROVERSY AND NOT CONVINCED THAT POLITICAL POLLING
IS WORTH THE TROUBLE. HE TOLD US RECENTLY, "WE DID NOT EXPECT
THIS. I WON'T DO THIS AGAIN. AFTER THE ELECTIONS, WE ARE GOING
BACK TO ASKING PEOPLE WHAT KIND OF MARGARINE THEY BUY AND WHAT
KIND OF DEODORANT THEY USE."

HIGH-FLYERS AND BOTTOM-FEEDERS

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